

Promoting Youth Voice Through Gardening: Youth First Community of Promise

Anoka County SHIP Success Story

Youth First Community of Promise has been a long-time partner of Anoka County SHIP. Their mission is to actively engage youth, their families, and the community to ensure youth have the five fundamental promises they need to succeed: *Caring Adults, Safe Places, A Healthy Start, Effective Education, and Opportunities to Help Others*. Youth First serves middle and high school youth from Ramsey, Anoka, Andover, and Coon Rapids. This year they were a recipient of Neighborhood Mini-grant funding, a first-time program offered by Anoka County SHIP.

This summer, despite the challenges of COVID-19, Youth First was still able to offer programming for youth. With the help of SHIP mini-grant funding, the organization was able to increase utilization of their garden space by purchasing garden hand tools, a shed to store garden and physical activity equipment, and starter plants from a local plant nursery. Devin Hanson, Executive Director at Youth First, said that the youth would naturally gravitate to the garden and wanted to spend time there whenever staff opened the gate.

Even with the small space, both staff and youth were very engaged in the garden and were amazed with how much food the garden produced. This summer saw an abundance of tomatoes, zucchini, onions, green beans, cucumbers, jalapenos, and banana peppers. The group experimented with planting herbs and learned to connect certain herbs to their use such as rosemary and oregano in pasta sauce. Devin expressed how fun it was to see the youth try the different herbs and figure out which ones they did and didn't like. One day the youth were able to harvest the basil and use it to make pesto sauce for lunch, and for many of the youth, that was their first time trying pesto. Thanks to funding from SHIP, two shades were purchased to provide relief from the sun both for the plants and for the youth, making the garden a great space for the youth to safely hang out and learn about growing food.

While garden season is over for the year, Youth First already has plans for next season including making structural changes to the garden and expanding the space to add in a few waist-high garden beds.



Anoka County
MINNESOTA

Respectful, Innovative, Fiscally Responsible



Supported by the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership, Minnesota Department of Health